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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of self-disclosure and identification in the dyadic communication of the new black assistant professor on a predominantly white campus. The paper focuses on four aspects of dyadic communication: a working discussion of self-disclosure and identification, and analysis of the possible effect of the two variables on a few of the first black scholars, a theoretical probe into the nature of the relationship of the black professor in his new position, and a brief perspective on the future of self-disclosure and identification as influencing variables in the face to face communications of minority faculty. The paper examines interaction of the black professor with four other respondents: the white professor, the white student, the senior black professor, and the black student. (RB)

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SELF-DISCLOSURE AND IDENTIFICATION: DYADIC COMMUNICATIONS OF THE NEW ASSISTANT BLACK PROFESSOR ON A WHITE CAMPUS

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SELF-DISCLOSURE AND IDENTIFICATION: DYADIC COMMUNICATIONS
OF THE NEW ASSISTANT BLACK PROFESSOR ON A WHITE CAMPUS

Recent impact concerning the existing one percent of black Ph.D's in America has been upon that proportion hired as assistant professors into predominantly white universities.[1] Since black Ph.D's are graduated from various graduate schools all over the United States, administrators, in an effort to meet H.E.W's request, have been content with simply locating black scholars to fill available faculty positions. Once these positions are filled, little interest is placed on the new assistant black professor's role as an effective communicator, his ability to respond and cope with various communicative stimuli, and the different rhetorical situations in which he might find himself. While most Ph.D's are screened carefully through interviews, the few that pass the "inspection of approval" given by each member of their perspecitve departments will have encountered a preview of the many and varing evaluations that will accompany their face to face confrontations as new assistant professors.

Thus, it is the purpose of this paper to examine the role of self-disclosure and identification in the dyadic communication of the new black assistant professor on a predominantly white campus. Generally, the paper will focus on four divisions: a working discussion of self-disclosure and identification, an analysis of the possible effect of the two variables on a few of the first black scholars, a theoretical probe into the nature of four dyads that involve the black professor in his new position, and a brief

perspectus on the future of self-disclosure and identification as influencing variables in the face to face communications of minority faculty.

Specifically, the paper is an autobiographical insight intended as a starting point or a theoretical construct that will encourage, hopefully, a more in-depth study of the kinds of problems it raises. It is the goal of the writer to familarize other educators and administrators of the nature of communication as effected by the presents of, and the order of occurrence of self-disclosure and identification in face to face conversation. I will be concerned here only with the face to face communication shared on dyadic bases by the black professor and four other respondents: the white professor, the white student, the senior black professor, and the black student.

A WORKING DISCUSSION OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AND IDENTIFICATION

Self-disclosure and identification are discussed as functional variables in the study of dyadic communication in the intra-disciplinary areas of Speech Communication Studies. Self-disclosure is a concept frequently discussed in the study of interpersonal communication. Identification is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the study of contemporary rhetorical theory that has found itself sprouting as an improtant term of the "new rhetoric."[2]

Self-disclosure

Samuel Culbert defines self-disclosure as "an individual explicitly communicating to one or more others some personal information that he believes these others would be unlikely to acquire unless he himself discloses it."[3] The late Sidney Jourard, professor of psychology, stated that "through my self-disclosure, I let others know my soul. They can know it, really know it, only as I make it known."[4] When discussing the same phenomenon,

Michael Burgoon, associate professor of speech, wirtes that "when people seek interactions merely to enhance their own images, they are usually very careful to reveal only those aspects of their feelings and thoughts that will serve such premeditated goals, and can rarely just by themselves."[5] Finally, after publishing a literature review, Corby defines self-disclosure as "any information about himself which Person A communicates verbally to a Person B."[6]

A noteworthy inference of the above discussion of self-disclosure suggests that the degree of influence of this variable in face to face communication is controlled voluntarily by the individual wishing to disclose information about himself. This preconceived choice of whether or not to disclose information to another person about oneself is a key function in describing and evaluating the sincerity of information exchange between communicator and listener. While the communicator intentionally refuses to disclose certain kinds of information, the listener may recognize such behavior as a "holdback" or concealment of thoughts that should be germane to the discussion. Consequently, this concealment of information becomes one of the many identifying sign-cues the listener uses to familiarize himself with the behavior of the speaker, especially in light of how these sign-cues will effect future discussions. This position is supported in the following example. A white student spoke to a black classmate about the content of a midterm examination both had taken in one of my introductory interpersonal communication classes. During the conversation, the white student initiated different subtopics within the discussion, controlled the amount of discussion on those subtopics, and showed some influence in determining the amount of verbal feedback the accepted or rejected from his classmate. The white student's real purpose for being the most aggressive speaker may have originated from his intentional desire to withhold information about the letter grade he received on the

midterm examination. Perhaps this intentional refusal to disclose personal information was a revealing cue within itself. Thus, the black student may have recognized this concealment as a nonverbal cue and identified it with other sign-cues picked up in conversation.

In addition, it seems apparent that while face to face communication is relaxed, one participant may speak intentionally for the purpose of withholding information about himself. Consequently, responsible self-disclosure may not exist until a mutual understanding and "identification" is established between the two participants.[7]

Identification

Scholars have labelled identification as an important variable in the small discussion group. For example, Phillips and Erickson suggest that identification not be taken for granted in discussion. She [illegible] discussion group cannot afford to assume identity of interests [illegible] discussion [illegible] the role of identification in communication is obvious. [illegible] must be identifiable and have a particular identity [illegible] In addition, Gallois is convinced that true identification between communicators [illegible] of one's self-understanding that are received [illegible] of one's interaction with one's total environment, which includes everything [illegible] experience, consciously and unconsciously, of the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social world of [illegible] Burgoon suggests that identification [illegible] either as an ongoing phenomenon or a dimension of self-identity. [illegible] a person must actively and consciously work at expressing his thoughts and feelings in order to strengthen and sustain his self-identity.[8] In further defining identification as "the process of establishing a common ground or shared position with your audience,"[9]

In the study of contemporary rhetorical theory and as a concept of the "new rhetoric," identification acquires its meaning from Kenneth Burke's philosophy of rhetoric. In his A Rhetoric of Motives identification is discussed in the following manner:

> A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is 'identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not j 'ned, if he assumes that they are or is persuaded to believe so.[23]

In addition, Burke contends that "to identify A with B is to make A 'consubstantial' with B." Hence, both "A and B share between themselves a 'unity' or a 'locus of motives'."[24] Finally, Burke suggests that "the simplest case of persuasion is identification," a phenomenon that encompasses more than just speech: "You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."[25]

In the development of this paper, identification is considered useful as a process of understanding how various social or contextual elements can be combined with the discourse in an effort to explain how identification is achieved. Some elements considered include characteristics of the discourse or some aspect of the contextual situation that could produce or receive influence regarding how the perception of ethos by the audience. In essence, identification is the projection of ethos, images, attitudes, and ideas during interaction or future communication that alter the discourse to become "consistent and with each other, some shared between themselves a "unity" or a "locus of motives."

This paper explores the relationship of rhetorical criticism to a theory and identification is defined as above. I will attempt to explain the role of the two variables in their communication of the new

black assistant professor on a predominantly white campus. First, let us review the possible effect of both self-disclosure and identification on earlier black scholars.

A HISTORICAL INFLUENCE OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AND IDENTIFICATION

History reveals that the black professor's chances of disclosing information about himself or his research to his colleagues were limited. For example, Allison Davis,[16] the first black social anthropologist to teach at the University of Chicago, found that the preconceived prejudices of him that were exhibited in his academic department prevented him from sharing professional ideas with his colleagues and hampered the chances of [illegible]

versal standards."[17] Again, while

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Conyers, a black sociologist, Indiana

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oration of a black perspective."[21]

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As Conyers' view on integrated education was adapted as a universial practice, the opportunties for the dissemination of useful information exchange and effective self-disclosure in dyadic communication increased between the black instructor and his immediate peers. Nonetheless, administrators are still seriously concerned about the effectiveness of communication in the various dyads in which the black professor might find himself.

A THEORETICAL PROBE INTO THE NATURE OF THE FOUR DYADS

The following section will explore four stereotypic dyadic interactions in which the black professor is a participant with the white professor, the senior black professor, the white student, and the black student. I realize that other "pair-off" confrontations that involve the black professor may occur (such as dyads that include Mexican Americans and Africans); however, they will not be discussed in this paper.

The dyadic communications mentioned here are described by analyzing the nature of self-disclosure and identification, and the perceived occurrence of the two variables during conversation between the black professor and his respondent. Specifically, the order of occurrence of these two variables during discussion may have an effect on how each person judges the overall effect of the disscussion, that is, whether conversation is a rewarding experience for both discussants.

The Black Professor and White Professor

Superficial automation of the communication process may promote misunderstandings and assure that negative identifications precede effective self-disclosure. Here, automation is defined as any "labor saving cues" or past events" that a person draws from his subconscious to facilitate an understanding of the ongoing discussion.[22] For example, a black professor

of sociology here at the University of Florida told me that most of his white colleagues seemed afraid and unrelaxed around him, an observation he recognized during informal conversation. When I asked him to describe the nature of the discussion, the black professor voiced his disapproval of the frequent number of affirmative responses uttered by his colleague. In essence, the white colleague said,"yes" and nodded his head only for the purpose of keeping the conversation smooth and free of any interruptions. In fact, by agreeing with the black professor when actually he did not agree, the white colleague may have attempted to establish a positive identification or cohesive relationship through sound, tonality, and gesture at the expense of establishing clarity, understanding, and sincerity. As a result, the black professor may have sensed a note of mistrust because the responses seemed directed toward him rather that his message, thus causing the black professor to voluntarily hault further disclosures.

Similar to the stifling effects of superficial automation of communication, anticipating deprecatory behavior may hamper effective dyadic communication between the black professor and his colleague. Such behavior indicates that a person expects to be contradicted or misunderstood.[23] Hereagain, an effective disclosure of information may not occur until after the identification process has fully developed.

The Black Professor and the Senior Black Professor

An immediately assumed postive identification of the new assistant black professor by the senior black professor may precede the presents of effective self-disclosure. Initially after being introduced, the senior professor may consider himself "consubstantial" with the new professor only insofar as their skins are the same color, which provides initial grounds for establishing mutual trust. Since each professor shares, to a degree,

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the impact of the historical plight of the "black man" over the last four hundred years, there is little reason to suppress the possibility for an immediate comradeship between the two professors. Thus, an assumed positive identification is therefore a guide or a cue for the senior black professor to disclose information about himself. Furthermore, the senior professor might assume a "role taking position of guidance and authority in order to steer the new professor away from the academic, social, and political pitfalls he may encounter. I have seen several instance in which an assumed positive identification has preceeded effective self-disclosure. One black senior professor spoke to me at length about understanding the "psychology" of the students in a predominantly white class. He seemed more irterested in disclosing useful information to me about himself rather than collecting and evaluating immediate stimuli that would define to him the relationship between us.

Another observation can be made about the immediate assumption of a positive identification between the two black porfessors. When such an identification is presumed to be apparent, an automation of the communication process increases the efficiency of interpersonal communication. In informal conversation with several senior black professors, I was able to understand ideas and to identify with the language, tonality, and syntax in which those ideas were verbally expressed to me. Clarity seemed to be enhanced by the mere fact of past common "black experiences."

Deprecatory behavior by one of the discussants in conversation may indicate that effective self-disclosure should prelude a positive identification. In particular, one senior black professor seemed to expect me to disagree with everything he said about the social, academic, and psychological adjustments one must make on a large, predominantly

white campus. He anticipated my opinions to be radically different from his, even when they were not. Consequently, this deprecatory behavior caused me to voluntarily limit further disclosures that advocated a stance, away from the status-quo.

The Black Professor and the White Student

Self-disclosure and identification between the new assistant black professor and two stereotypic white students may take on a reverse-order effect in face to face communication. The first stereotypic student is interested in establishing a positive identification with the black professor before he discloses germane information about himself. In the beginning stages of dyadic communication, he is fascinated with the chance to know what makes the black professor "tick." While participating in conversation, he analyzes and interprets verbal and nonverbal sign-cues in order to find out whether the professor shows malice or hatred against whites, especially since such behavior might have an effect the evaluation of his academic performance. In addition, the student's ultimate purpose may be to satisfy old myths and to confirm or reject existing research on the intellectual inferiority of Blacks, something he might try to judge by his own definition of effective oral discourse.[24]

The second stereotypic white student may voluntarily delay an immediate and overt evaluation of the black instructor's credibility in order to disclose information that is germane to their meeting purpose. As pointed out by a black female behavioral scientist, psychology department, University of Florida, while the student may be sightly influenced by the personality of the instructor, perhaps his main focus in the immediate discussion centers on solving problems that may have arisen during past lectures. The student may openly admit the degree of difficulty he is having

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in the course and ask for help. At any rate, the student discloses information first and attempts to establish a positive identification second, while the accomplishment of the two includes some overlap.

The Black Professor and the Black Student

While two stereotypic images the black student may be exhibited in face to face communication with the black professor, the first image is apparent when the actual environmental setting delays the student's quest to assume an immediate positive identification and his self-disclosure. I have witnessed that more black students than white students are aware of the environment of my office. For example, after talking a few minutes to me in my office, one black student commented: "I feel like I am reverting toward segregation by rapping (talking) to you, and "dig" we'er the only two "heads" (Blacks) on the floor." The black student shows tension; he acts excitedly uncomfortable. This emotionality functions as a "breakdown" in a conscious awareness of those sign-cues that will facilitate identification. And, until a polarizing state is regained and the student has enough time to read identifying sign-cues, that student's disclosure of information about himself is restricted.

In contrast, the second image of the stereotypic black student is shown when he assumes that an initial-positive identification should be automatic between him and the professor. Perhaps, the student's previous interactions with others of the academic black community encouraged him to rely on the black professor as a social counselor rather than a skilled educator. The student believes that since he is a minority member on campus, just as the new assistant black professor, both should sense an overwhelming desire to satisfy needs of interpersonal affiliation above everything else. Thus, the professor should function as a social therapist

who takes on a responsibility that, in nature, is more therapeutic than academic. Furthermore, when this kind of an initially assumed identification does not occur and the black professor fails to relate to the black student in the way that the student wishes, conflict arises, and the black student may refer to the black professor as "handkerchief head," a name-calling device that carries the same connotations as "Uncle Tom."

CONCLUSION

While slightly modifying self-disclosure to read as the act of a speaker giving "verbal" information about himself to a listener with a conscious awareness of withholding certain "other" information and operationally defining identification as a process of understanding and labelling verbal and nonverbal "sign-cues" that may be substantially associated with the two discussants and their rhetorical environment, this paper has presented several personal testimonies concerning the perceived impact of both of these variables in dyadic communication between the new assistant black professor and four stereotypic respondents: the white professor, the white student, the senior black professor, and the black student. Of specific focus, attention has been given to an analysis of the order of occurrence of these two variables during conversation. The autobiographical support for many of the examples of the different dyads has shown that identification, whether postive or negative, usually precedes effective self-disclosure. However, as pointed out in the stereotypic dyad: Black Professor and White Student, the order of occurrence is reversiable.

Finally, the "accountability" of self-disclosure and identification

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in face to face communication should be the direction of future research.[25] As a follow-up study to this seemingly "eye-witness report on the role of self-disclosure and identification in discussion, a survey is, at present, being conducted in order to empirically test some of the questions raised in this paper. Hopefully, an analysis of the collected data will provide administrators and faculty with useful information concerning the effect of these two variables in the dyadic communications of minority faculty on large university campuses.

FOOTNOTES

[1] William Moore Jr. and Lennie H. Wagstaff assemble a conglomeration of data that locates the employment of the minority Ph.D in America. See "Progress and Plight." in their Black Educators in White Colleges, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974), pp. 189-191.

[2] Kenneth Burke, "The Range of Rhetoric," A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), pp. 20-28.

[3] Samuel A. Culbert, "The Interpersonal Process of Self-Disclosure: It Takes Two to See One," Explorations in Applied Behavioral Science, No. 3 (1967), p. 2.

[4] S.M. Jourard, The Transparent Self (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1964), pp. 3-6.

[5] Michael Burgoon, Approaching Speech Communication (Holt; Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), p. 193.

[6] Paul C. Cozby, "Self-Disclosure: A Literature Review," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 79, No. 2 (February 1973), p. 73.

[7] Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 55.

[8] Gerald M. Phillip and Eugene C. Erickson, Interpersonal Dynamics in the Small Group (Random House, Inc., 1970), p. 140.

[9] John W. Keltner, "Interacting with Others: Face to Face in a Small Group," Messages: A Reader in Human Communication ed. by Jean M. Cicikly, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), p. 171.

[10] Ibid., p. 41.

[11] Burgoon, Approaching Speech Communication, p. 194.

[12] Ibid., p. 255.

[13] Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 20.

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14 Ibid., p. 21.

15 Ibid., p. 55.

16 Roger M. Williams, "The Emancipation of Black Scholars," Saturday Review, 59 (December 18, 1971), 55.

17 Ibid., p. 54.

18 Martin Kilson, "Black Studies Movements: A Plea for Perspective," The Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, 76, No. 8. October 1969, p. 328.

19 Williams, Saturday Review, p. 54.

20 Ibid., p. 59.

21 Ibid., p. 54.

22 Ivor A. Richard, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 32.

23 Burgoon, Approaching Speech Communication, p. 199.

24 Waldo W. Braden, "Myths In A Rhetorical Context," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 40 (Winter, 1975), 119-120.

25 Vito Perrone and Warren Strandberg, "A Perspective on Accountability," Teachers College Record, No. 3. February 1972, p. 348.